

1838

Superintending School Committee Report, 1838, Orrington

Town of Orrington, Maine

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School Committee's Report 1838

The Superintending School Committee having received from the Town the indulgence of delay from the Annual March Meeting until the present time now beg leave to report, not only an account of their own proceedings, and of the present state of the Schools, but also to suggest to the Town such alterations and improvements as the spirit of the age, and the wants of the rising generation seem loudly to demand.

Your Committee assumed their official duty soon after their election to Office by visiting such of the Public Schools as had not closed. Without attempting to give a detailed or even a general account of the state or progress of the Schools then in operation which would seem more properly to belong to the preceding Committee, they have only to say that the result of these visits was a conviction in the minds of your Committee that a great and lamentable evil existed for want of a more uniform system of class books, and that although systems of books had been agreed upon by some preceding Committee yet there appeared to be no list extant, and it was left to the will and caprice of every new Teacher to introduce such books, as his own fancy dictated, which were generally found to be such as he had practiced from.

Hence has grown up a lamentable and destructive evil and, one which your Committee thinks calls loudly for reform.

There proved to be almost as great a variety of books on almost every study taught in our schools as there were Scholars.

We conceive that the fact cannot but be apparent to almost every citizen of the Town that much of the success and prosperity of the School depends upon a proper classification of the same, and that this cannot be effected without a uniform system of class books. Six hours per day is the usual time of keeping our Public Schools. Hence in a School numbering fifty the Teacher has but six minutes per day to devote to each Scholar, or three minutes each half day. The Teachers who are now present it is presumed will bear testimony to the fact, that not a single half day passes in the School room when not four fold at least of this amount of time is wanted to simplify and elucidate to the juvenile mind some dark and intricate point either in science or literature. Now if almost every scholar in school has a different Arithmetic a different Grammar a different Geography, or a different class book on

a different class book on any of the branches taught in our schools it is evident the school cannot be systematically classed, and that every new principle to be illustrated must be gone through with separately with each individual - this would consume so much of the Teachers time that much which is important to be done must be left undone. Now if by a little attention on the part of Teachers, and a little additional expense on the part of Parents and Guardians, a systematic classification can be brought about a great saving of time, will be brought about effected, and much more instruction imparted to the scholar. A class of 20 scholars can as easily be led through the dark ~~mineral~~ labyrinth and intricate windings of science and literature as a single scholar.

Suppose a school of 60 to be divided into four classes of 15 each and that the six minutes allowed to each scholar per day by the Teacher, be devoted to the class collectively and it will be perceived that each individual can be benefited with the presence of his Teacher six times fifteen minutes equal to one and a half hours. Perhaps the advantages of classification when in practice may not be quite equal to the above theory yet it is evidently of too much advantage to be neglected, and your Committee have thought proper thus to give their views upon the subject as a justification for the expense incurred upon the town by printing for circulation a list of such books as in their opinion were best adapted to the use of our schools.

In selecting the list of books to be used the Committee were guided by principles of economy as well as utility, when both could be combined. They have retained on their list such books as were already in school, when no strong reason called for their removal. Selecting from the multiplicity that now abide what were most suitable and rejecting the others.

It was also thought that if the list agreed upon was printed that the system would be less likely to meet with constant and repeated change by every succeeding Committee and hence avoid much expense on the part of Parents and confusion and vexation to Teachers and Scholars.

This list has been circulated among the families in town, and it was hoped that the Committee would receive the cooperation of every parent in town in bringing about a reformation so much desired. They take pleasure in acknowledging that in many instances their wishes have been readily complied with, but at their closing visits to the schools we regret to say that

their expectations have not been realized to that extent which they had fondly and confidently anticipated.

In some instances their disappointment may justly be attributed to the negligence of the Teacher. In district No 4. Much complaint was made by the Teacher about books, and yet he had paid so little attention to his list and instructions that he did not know the titles of the books it contained. But we believe the fault in no other instance can be attributed to the Teacher, we are happy in being able to say that they are honourable exceptions to the above charge, or aught else that is unworthy.

The respectful request and earnest solicitation of the Teachers for the children to be furnished with books, have not in all cases been met with that promptitude and cheerfulness ~~which~~, which we have a right to expect from the citizens of an enlightened community. To Parents and Guardians then, we wish to urge home the importance, and absolute necessity of uniting with the School Committee and the Teachers to reform this evil, if they are desirous that their children should receive the benefit of the school.

Complain not that your children are not educated if you do not furnish them with the tools of education.

The fault is not in the teacher or in the child but in your own negligence. Where is the Farmer who does not reject the uncouth and clumsy implements of Agriculture used in older time, and cheerfully spend his money to purchase the improved articles of modern days!

And it is economy in time and strength so to do. We ask then is the improvement and cultivation of the immortal part of man of less consequence than the cultivation of the soil upon which we tread - Is it of more importance that we should amass wealth, and lay up much goods in store the better to enable us to indulge in sickening luxury or effeminating idleness, than that we aid the rising generation to move on in that progressive improvement of their spiritual natures which the great God and Father of All Nations evidently designs. Improvements in the art of teaching have kept pace with improvements in Mechanics and Agriculture, May they have even preceded them for it is from the cultivated mind that improvements in all that is useful and good for man emanate, and those of us who suffer our dormant souls to lag behind in this ever onward career, are responsible for the neglect of an important duty to those intrusted to our care and guidance.

In urging upon the elder class of people the importance of a good system of books, your Committee have been sometimes met with the argument that, we did, very well without them in our days, that there used to be but one Arithmetic in School and that was the masters, and perhaps some venerable and aged man now present, who has travelled far onward, in life's thorny path, is ready to respond to the same sentiment. We love, we honor, we revere, the aged man, and are always happy in listening to his teachings, and oft does the tear of gratitude start from the glistening eye when we recount in our minds the services which we have received at their hands. But they will permit us to remind them that few indeed were the studies pursued in our common schools in those days compared with the present. Sciences which in those days were hidden in mystery and buried in impenetrable technicalities, and if known at all, kept only for the benefit of the favored few have since been cleared of their rubbish and brought from the closet by the all powerful aid of the press into the light and glare of open day. Many of them have been introduced and taught with profit and advantage in our common schools.

It is a fact well established in the minds of our Committee that lads at the age of Twelve years having been properly instructed in the science of Arithmetic ~~are~~ are capable of obtaining sufficient knowledge of that science to enable them to transact any business that occurs in an extensive mercantile House, and will then be prepared to advance onward to the higher branches of Mathematics, such as Algebra, Geometry &c. This could not be effected under the old system of Teaching scarcely at the age of Sixteen.

Closely connected with school books is School apparatus. - The sense of vision is acknowledged to be the most powerful Organ of communication to the mind of all the senses. - "What I see, I believe" is an expression as familiar and common as house hold words. The importance of this simple phrase, in the cause of education has not been fully appreciated until within a few years past, and the application of it to practical teaching has ~~created~~ developed facts which have astonished the most incredulous, and caused the dawning of a new Era in the Progress of Science.

Your Committee therefore in view of the importance of this subject, suggest to the town the propriety of furnishing the several school districts with such cheap and simple apparatus as will enable our teachers to illustrate to the pupils mind, by ocular demonstration, such Sciences as can be more readily communicated through the Eye than through the Ear. We appeal to all present to say. - If the giddy height of the precipice, the deafening roar of the Cataract, or the placid and serene beauty of the cultivated field, can be so strongly and vividly impressed upon the mind by any written description of them ~~as by~~ ^{so} ~~how oft~~ ^{ever} repeated as by one single glance with the Eye. The same is true in Science as it is in natural scenery. - What ever is presented to the Eye is more readily received and longer retained than that which is communicated through the ear. The School house should if possible be made a place of interest to the pupils, one to which they will resort with pleasure, rather than a place of in house restraint. - Mechanical illustrations by a judicious teacher have a tendency to produce this effect.

Articles of apparatus most necessary as we conceive are a Terrestrial globe to illustrate the Science of Geography - A set of Geometrical solids and diagrams and in Geology simple specimens of the Primitive rocks, and ~~also~~ ^{some} of more recent formations, all correctly labelled.

In Dr. Jacksons 2^d report on the Geology of Maine he says "On the Moose river it is probable that nearly all the soil, which forms the intervals upon the banks of that river are of Alluvial origin or were brought down and deposited by that river while its course winding its way among various rocks, principally Gran- wacke, Limestone slate, and Trap would enable the water to take up and deposit various rich alluvions? Now suppose we had specimens of these three rocks, say Gran- wacke, Limestone slate and Trap correctly labelled by the hand of science, should not we get a better idea of the soil composing the much talked of intervals of the Moose river than we shall by volumes of written description even by Dr. Jackson himself."

That your Committee might be able to present to the Town correct statistical information of the Schools they caused blank Abstracts to be printed and furnished to the Teachers to be filled by them and returned to the Committee - These Abstracts require first the amount of Days kept by each Teacher Male and Female. 2^d when each Scholar entered School 3^d when he left. 4th Number of Days attendance. 5th that Scholars are absent at invitation by the Committee 6th Names and ages of the Scholars and Studies they attend to. The returns in all cases have not been so full and complete as to enable the Committee to give such a statistical view of the Schools as they had originally intended, or as the Town have reason to expect.

From such returns as we have received we gather the following facts. In District No 1 a Summer School was kept about sixty five days and a male School 75 days giving 140 days school in all. 43 Scholars attended the Summer School more or less - the average number in attendance was 35 and their average age seven years.

The Winter School consisted of 82 Scholars - Average number that attended 60 - Average age 11 years.

In District No 2 a Summer School was taught but the length of the School is not known. Thirty seven Scholars compose this School their average age was $7\frac{25}{37}$ years - In this District the Committee neglected to furnish the Teacher with a blank and consequently the return is imperfect. A Winter School was also kept in this District, but the time kept is not noted on the Teachers return, 51 Scholars was the total number that attended, average number that attended 45 and average age 16 years. We regret to learn from the general remarks of the Teacher, that little interest appears to be manifested by the parents for the success of the School - so little in fact that many days fuel was not provided to warm the house, and the time both of Teacher and Scholars wholly lost. In District No 3 a Summer School was kept, but no return made from the Teacher - A Winter School was also kept sixty nine days. Total number of Scholars Eighty five average number 70. We copy the following remarks from the Teachers Abstract: "All the Scholars taught in reading except six destitute of books, several taught in reading by borrowing books. Some have been destitute of any books."

In District No 4. A Summer School of considerable length was taught, but the requirements of the Committee that an Abstract might be filled, were thought by the Teacher to be so burdensome, that but, "little of anything else could be done in school," and consequently he neglected to make any return.

A Winter School was also kept in this District 77 Days and when the Teacher was called upon by the Committee for his Abstract, he remarked that he had kept his record of the school on a piece of loose paper in his hat, and that he had lost it, and consequently could not fill out his return, but in compliance with the earnest request of the Committee he consents to do the best he could from recollection.

This School was composed of from 85 to 95 Scholars average number in attendance about 65. Average age is said to be 16 years, but from the several ages of the Scholars returned in his Abstract we find the average age to be but $10\frac{26}{35}$ years.

In District No 5, was a Summer School 64 days 26 Scholars attended, the average age of which was $7\frac{4}{13}$ years. A Winter School was also kept in this District 44 Days. Total number of Scholars was 34.

Average number 27. In the Teachers return from this District the ages of the scholars are wholly omitted while in other respects the return is very full and satisfactory.

From District No 6 the Committee have received no return and are not aware that either Summer or Winter Schools have been taught in it.

In District No 7 a Summer School was in operation 44 days - Total Number of Scholars 47 Average number 34 average age $8\frac{2}{3}$ years.

A Winter school was in operation in this District 66 Days - Total number of Scholars 62. Average No 55 Average Age $11\frac{1}{2}$ years.

In District No 8, no Summer School was taught. The Winter School continued 44 days. Total number of Scholars 37 Average number 30 Average age 13 years.

From this return, the Committee take pleasure in copying the following Notes of the Teacher. "Weather for the most part pleasant, so that Scholars were able to get to school constantly. It is believed that a good degree of interest was felt in the School by both Parents and Scholars; all appeared desirous

8th of improving what privilege should be allowed them to the best advantage. - House tolerable comfortable with the exception of a day or two. Scholars with very few exceptions furnished with books, but not all that similarity which would render the school easily clasped, to pursue the several branches with pleasure and profit."

In District No 9. No Summer school was taught, and the Teacher has failed to inform us how long the winter school continued - Total No of scholars 37 Average number 35 - Average Age 11 Years.

From the above details we gather the following general facts - The whole number of scholars returned as attending the Winter Schools is 473 That of this Number 278 have received instruction in Writing. 76 in English Grammar 19 in Composition & familiar Letter writing, 123 in Geography 263 in Arithmetic 35 in History, 17 in Book keeping. None of our scholars have advanced to the higher branches of Mathematics say Algebra and Geometry. And yet, we could wish that to a sea faring and Nautical People like ourselves the Science of Geometry were made familiar; its application to Navigation renders it necessary that it should be so. We wish that every young man from our town before he sets his foot on ship-board, were a complete navigator, so far at least as a knowledge of the Theory would make him one. No Argument is necessary from your Committee to show the utility of this Art. With the exception of 20 Scholars in District No 2 and one scholar in District No 7 the study of the very useful and important art of book-keeping is entirely neglected. Every man in the community should be acquainted with this Art.

It is of too much practical utility to be neglected. How many unpleasant feelings among neighbours, and how much litigation in our courts, might be avoided by the practice of this art is not to be defined by your Committee.

As a matter of taste and pleasure if not productive of dollars and cents we should be gratified to see a more general attention paid to geography Out of the whole number of scholars

Less than 100 attend to ~~geography~~ this science, and when we reflect that scarcely a single Newspaper paragraph can be read intelligibly without some knowledge of its location, we think the importance of the subject is not fully appreciated by our youth or their parents.

X From our Abstracts we learn another fact which seems to your Committee to call for some mitigation at least. In District No 1 A lengthy Summer School was taught and a Winter School of 75 days while in Districts No 8 & 9 No Summer Schools were taught and the Winter Schools of about half the length of those in the Front Districts. And yet the burden of taxation for the support of schools is equally borne. The individual in District No 9 is taxed \$5. for the support of schools and his children can attend school two months while another who pays \$5. tax in District No 1. has the privilege of six months School.

Your Committee are aware that this principle is in conformity with the law of the State. But this Law also provides a remedy. It provides that any towns who choose may elect a Committee for the purpose of managing the Schools. And that this Committee have the authority to expend the towns money in such manner as may best promote the Public good and the general cause of Education. It appears to your Committee that by uniting in some cases two districts in one, and making some slight alterations in others, much good might be expected; And that then the schools should be of uniform length, and commence uniformly at the same time. The comparatively slight difference in the number of Scholars in the different districts, would be an evil of much less magnitude, than the difference of one or two months in the length of the schools; because if a school is systematically classed one containing 60 Scholars can be taught with about as much facility as one containing 40. Scholars. It is respectfully submitted to the Town whether they will attempt any improvement under this head.

Your Committee have also caused to be printed and circulated among the Teachers a code of rules and regulations the better to enable them to govern their schools, and to make them less amenable to individual will and caprice, when in the discharge of an arduous and painful duty they are obliged to enforce by corporal punishment wholesome and salutary restraint.

The duty of the Teacher, does of necessity sometimes come in contact not only with the will and wishes of the scholar but of the parent also, under such circumstances it is right that the Teachers authority should be supported in as much as he conducts with prudence and discretion.

Our Committee in expressing their views of the present state of the schools, do not wish to flatter the town into the false belief that they ^{are} flourishing and prosperous. We conceive them far otherwise. And yet far be it from us to attribute any fault to our old and well tried Teachers. They have manifested a degree of zeal and interest in their calling far beyond the compensation they have received, and had their efforts been seconded and strengthened by the cooperation of the parents the schools would bear a different aspect from what they now do. Many of our Teachers are now present and far be it from the Committee to flatter them in their presence, yet they must not deny us the satisfaction of expressing our gratitude to them, in as much as when they have scarcely received the cold nod of approval from the parents, they have pressed forward in the path of duty. "Unhonoured and unsung"

But our Schools remind us of the Frog in the Well if they leap forward three feet during the term, they at least fall back two of it during the long recess.

There is an evil too apparent to escape the notice of any individual who will give his attention to the subject. In many of our districts by the time the school is well organised and in good condition the money is expended, and the school brought to a close. This thing ought not so to be in an enlightened community, and when we look around upon the citizens now present, and take into consideration the good degree of general intelligence that they possess, we are more astonished to find so much coldness upon the subject of educating our youth.

We claim to be a religious people, - and we hold it to be an important religious duty to educate our youth; but in this word education we do not mean to be understood, the learning to calculate dollars and cents, the better to promote our own selfish views, or to learn to guide the state ship, the abode of life and intelligence over the trackless oceans, or to draw out the graces of rhetorical beauty by smoothly polished, and well rounded periods. But in the Language of an eminent Writer of the present day to "discover, obey and apply the Laws of Nature or in other words the Laws of God." - It is to draw out every thing in the man that is good - to repress everything that tends to evil. It is to make earth the abode of peace and happiness that was designed by the Creator, instead of wickedness and war.

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In closing this report perhaps we ought to apologise for the time we have occupied, but the subject has seemed to be one of magnitude and the importance of it to the community must plead our excuse.

Your Committee with the consent of the town will now speak one word of themselves. We have to confess before you gentlemen that we have not done our duty. We make this confession in the spirit of shame, humiliation and regret. But such have been our vocations that we could not under all circumstances, pay that attention to the schools, which duty seemed to demand, without great pecuniary sacrifice.

We have therefore not thought proper to make any change for services so poorly performed, but cheerfully offer gratuitously what ever good we may have done.

But we do hope a committee may be chosen to succeed us, who will faithfully perform its duties, and we also trust and hope that the town will not begrudge them a liberal compensation. We express these sentiments because we believe that an efficient superintending school committee, are the very life and soul of the school. We believe this committee should visit the schools punctually and in a body together.

We are happy to avail our selves here, of not only the sentiments but the language also of the Hon. Horace Mann, Secretary of the Board of education in Massachusetts. He says, "such visitations, may be a moral incitement to the scholars of great efficacy. Advice, encouragement, affectionate persuasion, coming from such of their townsmen as the children have been accustomed to regard with respect or veneration, will sink deep and remain long in their hearts. Wise council from acknowledged superiors makes a deep impress. It comes with the momentum of a heavy body, falling from a great height. The visitations of the committee break in upon the monotony of the school. They spur the slothful and reward the emulous and aspiring. To suppose, that the children in a school will ever feel a keen, impulsive interest in learning, while parents and neighbours are disregarded of it, is to suppose the children to be wiser than the men." But perhaps we have already digressed too far. We therefore most respectfully submit the foregoing to the town.

The importance we attach to this subject and the interest
we feel in it, would prompt us to extend our remarks
to an almost indefinite length, were it not that we feel
as if already ^{we} had trespassed too far upon the indulgence
of the Society. We therefore most respectfully submit the
following.

Orington 30th Mar

April 1st 1839

Signed

Theophilus Cushing

Chairman of S. Committee

Superintending
School Committee
Report, 1838